

That exam just might've been the death of me. Had me wonderin' which would give out from exhaustion first; the time limit on the exam, or my dang noggin' functioning correctly. I just kept staring at those problems like they were gonna solve themselves. Physics wasn't ever my strong suit anyways. There were a few problems that I recognized from last week's study guide but, holey moley! Am I glad that is over and done with. Now I just gotta find something to occupy my time with until my friends get out of the same darn exam. At least twice a week after Physics, Becca, Timmons, and I all go out to get something to eat. Majority of the time, we go to the five-and-dime just down the street and get ourselves a hot dog or a burger. Timmons, he's a funny one, a real class clown kind of guy. Timmons is actually his last name. His real name is Cornelius. He's told me though, he don't like it all that much, so he just goes by his last name. He's from here in Jackson, he knows this city like the back of his hand. Becca, she's a quaint gal who moved down south and ditched the farm life to go to school here at Tougaloo College. Then there's me, I come from a little city called Meridian, Mississippi. It's only about two hours east of here, almost to Alabama, really. Both Momma and Pa wanted me to take over the family store that my Granddaddy started, but I just couldn't find it in myself to stay put in little Meridian my whole life. I wanna be a doctor one day. They didn't want to tell me not to go to college, I could tell that was difficult seein' me go off. It'll be alright though, I'll make 'em proud and it'll all have been worth it in the end. After all, I'm halfway done college after this week. As I'm walking out of the building, I feel a bead of sweat instantly go down the back of my neck. I'll tell you what, that Sun sure is beating down on me enough to make me feel like a dog pantin' for some water. I wish we were like some other schools and had our final exams earlier in the month. Springtime in Mississippi is nice, but when you start nearin' summertime... it's a different story. The humidity makes you sweat, dang near everywhere. At least it's a beautiful day out. As I was

walking towards the bench we usually all meet at, I heard some police sirens begin wailing in the distance bound towards town. I take a seat and surely after that, I had remembered they was staging a sit-in at Woolworth's Lunch Counter. For the last three-ish months or so, there have been non-violent protests all across the south. I don't think one's taken place here in Jackson yet, so today should be interesting for sure. When you attend a HBCU, and you have folks back home who sit on the complete opposite side of the spectrum on the topic of segregation; you hear everything in between the two sides. It was one of the reasons I had to get away from my folks. I love 'em and all but I couldn't stand to hear any more of their nonsense. It was just the same relentless take as the rest of the majority of white peoples across the south. A person's mind can only take so much until it's just way too overwhelming to bear. Being here at Tougaloo, I feel like I'm in a space where not only are people not stared at differently for what bathrooms they use, what drinkin' fountain they drink from, but there is a sense of comradery found within everyone here. There's a lot more to seeing people for the beauty or the ugly in their heart than methods my folks back home seem to be stuck thinkin' on. On that thought, I see Becca comin' out from the building I just walked out of. I know she had to have done at least done better than I did on that physics exam. "Well, if that wasn't the most difficult thing I'll deal with for the rest of the day, Lord, have mercy on my soul."

"That's what I'm sayin'! Bits looked a little familiar but I'm not too sure that was my best work", I sigh. Guess it was that difficult of an exam, after all.

"I don't know, Topher! Every question in that class always looked different to me. Guess we'll find out on the transcripts, how we did!", Oh yeah, that's me. My name is Topher. Stands for Christopher. She goes on to talk on about that exam and how that might've been the most

difficult final she's taken her entire time here at Tougaloo. Shortly after her comin' out, following her is Timmons.

"Alllllllllrighttttt, and guess who's done sophomore year, baby!"

"Ugghhhhh, aren't you so lucky, Timmons", Becca groans in envy. I could understand that too though. I still have another one for Calculus II, tomorrow.

"Yeah man, no fair. I seriously don't understand how you managed to get out of all of these final exams this semester.". Timmons was able to complete this semester with only one final exam in his courses. I notice their attention shifts towards town where the sirens are coming from.

"Y'all down to go to the sit-in?", Timmons says with an enthused tone of voice.

"Timmons, I know you're playin' with me right now.", Becca dismisses. Honestly, this is completely something that he would get us into. I'm just not 100% sure that this was exactly how I planned my afternoon going. Timmons goes on to explain why we need to head over.

"Y'all come on! These sit-ins are genuinely, history in the making. We gotta at least go check it out. They're non-violent too. All we do is go in, sit down, and stay until we are served.". I can tell by Becca's face that she's not completely onboard. "Come on y'all. What else y'all got goin' on today? This is our time to stand up. And Toph, if you were there with us, you know how much that would stand out.". They both have now moved their focus from the obnoxious sirens to me. He's right though, they have all been nonviolent. Plus, I feel for my guys though. My eyes look up to Becca, who is standing in front of me. A slight nod from her. The simplest motion that said a million words.

"Y'all got to promise me, no matter what, we won't leave each other's sides." I ask. They both assure me, practically in-synch with each other;

“Promise.” And just like that, we all collectively sigh, and find ourselves making our way to town, to Woolworth’s Lunch Counter.

Throughout the entirety of the ten-minute walk, that Mississippi Sun was just beating down on us like it was the middle of July. Our attention wasn’t even on the Sun for a second though. The three of us were thinking the same million thoughts, all at once. There are police cars lined down the street, I suppose prepped and ready to bring guests to the county jailhouses. Just from walking up on the block already, it is undoubtedly packed and overwhelmingly loud.

I walk in first, with the two of them behind me on each side. It’s a circus in here. Absolute chaos. Total insanity. There’s a mob gathered around all the folks sittin’ on the stools.

“Y’all good still?” They both nod, reluctantly. I grab Becca’s hand, and she grabs Timmons and the three of us try to shuffle our way through the crowd and over to the counter. As we pass through, I see such vulgar and horrific faces from the mob watching us as we make our way over to take a seat. Not to mention, they’re shouting the most outrageous things you could call someone. I used to physically feel my soul wince when my Grandad would drop slurs, left and right. But these things they’re saying, I don’t even recognize some of the things bein’ hollered, and that feeling is just as revolting. I look to my left, towards the counter and I see police practically on every corner and the folks who have taken seats covered in anything you could think of. Ketchup, sugar, mustard, salt, shattered mugs on the ground, etc., you name it. There’s a blonde girl sitting at one of the stools in a white dress, which is now ruined with ketchup and coffee stains all down her back. It’s all in her hair too. She’s sitting next to a man that I recognize. He’s a white guy, brown hair, slender-lean build, and he’s got a briefcase down by his right foot. That’s a professor I had last semester. But like her, he also has an appearance decked out with every condiment on the bar, so it’s slightly hard to recognize from a side profile.

I see two seats across the way. If I couldn't sit with my friends, at least I could stand behind them. As we walk around and turn left to get them seated, a white man from the mob begins to taunt a man. I recognize him. He is sitting next to the seats I had eyed out for Becca and Timmons. Monty Jeffers. He was in my Civics course freshman year. Within an instant of whispering in his ear, Monty swivels on his seat into the mob's direction in order for what appears to make eye contact with the mobster. He says something and within a blink of an eye, he's pulled down by his ear, dragged to the ground and brutally kicked and punched on by randoms in the crowd. I shout to Becca to have a seat, and Timmons and I sprint to help get him up. Before we are able help him, four policemen have already ceased the situation by lifting Monty to his feet and placing him and the mobster that pulled him down under arrest. I watch Monty as he wears a sly grin across his face while he is escorted out of Woolworth's, down the steps and into that police car. Timmons grabs my wrist and we run to where Becca is seated.

“Nothing like dinner and a show, huh?”, Timmons says in efforts to lighten the mood. Becca and I glance at each other. “It's alright, he'll be just fine. He didn't hit back or nothin'.” He says to reassure us. He's right. As long as we remain non-violent, it'll be nothin' to sweat.

That was 60 years ago. As you can imagine, shortly after we sat down more of the mob came up to surround us and the rest of the row that we were sitting in. Which was then followed by an overwhelming amount of ignorant and baseless name-calling. I truly thought Timmons was going to let them hags have it and get arrested. We blended right in with the rest of them folks having seats. Drenched in condiments galore. That manager shut that store down that day. Deemed it was costin' more to keep it runnin' that day than serving all of us. The rest is history. And together, we kept our promises of stickin' together and like that, we changed the world.